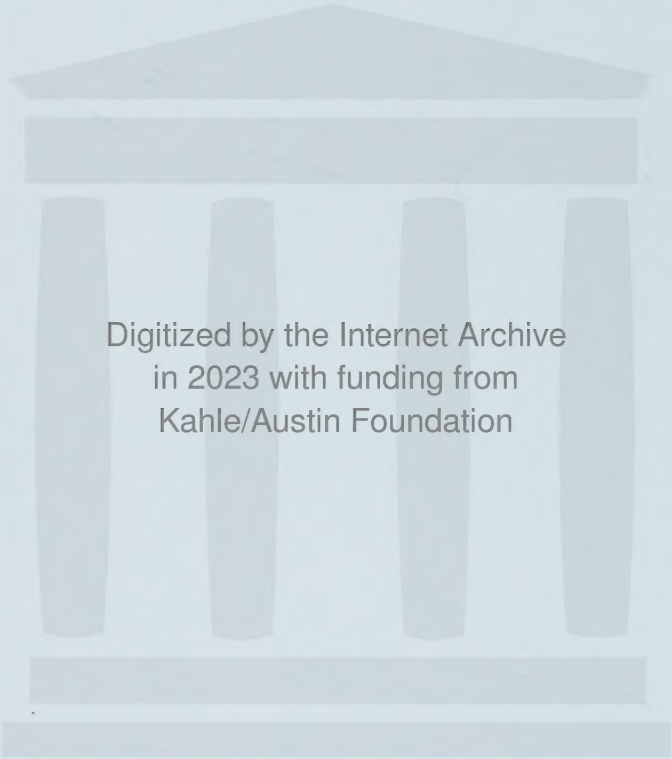
Mrs. Balfour's Civil War Diary

A Personal Account of the Siege of Vicksburg

By Emma Harrison Balfour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Gordon Cotton

Edited by Gordon A. Cotton
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Preface

The diary of Emma Balfour, giving personal accounts of the siege of Vicksburg, Miss., is one of the most oft-quoted personal sources of the famous Civil War conflict. Mrs. Balfour was a candid writer and keen observer, and as she lived next door to Gen. John. C. Pemberton's headquarters and only a few blocks from the domiciles of several other Confederate officials, she was in a prime position to see, hear, and know what was happening.

The diary began on Saturday, May 16, 1863 but it was obviously not Mrs. Balfour's first account as she started "Since I last wrote...." Her penmanship was terrible as she paid little attention to forming individual letters and wrote in a small, cramped style, leaving no margins on the 4 1/2 x 7 inch notebook pages. As was typical of the times, she often used dashes rather than periods or commas.

In transcribing the pages I have used some modern punctuation and have also paragraphed the entries. I have not consciously changed the spelling, even when Mrs. Balfour sometimes hyphenated gun-boat but usually wrote it as two words, or when she used the symbol "&" but occasionally reverted to spelling it. In order to acquaint the reader with people, places and events which she mentioned, explanatory notes have been included.

Though the 50-page booklet has always been referred to as a diary, I suspect that it was really intended as a personal account of events for Mrs. Balfour's sister-in-law, Lou Harrison of Faunsdale Plantation near Demopolis, Ala., with whom she kept a steady correspondence for many years. Possibly the reason there was no identification of individuals was that Mrs. Harrison knew them. There were entries such as on May 21 which began "I believe I did not tell you," and on May 23 she wrote "You must understand," lines evidently addressed to an individual. Like the Rev. William Lovelace Foster, Baptist chaplain who wrote a diary-style letter to his wife for he knew he could not mail it during the siege, Mrs. Balfour may have also added to her account, thinking she would eventually finish and mail it, though she never did.

In the 1960s one of Mrs. Balfour's descendants, Emma Collier Aiken, gave the manuscript to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. A note with it from Vicksburg author Harris Dickson, and dated in 1925, states that he read it, thought it should be published, and also mentioned that he had taken the pages apart in order to copy it. The diary has been published several times in recent years but this is the first time that notes and extensive illustrations have been included.

I appreciate the Mississippi Department of Archives and History for providing me with a copy of the diary along with permission to publish it. I am especially grateful to H. Grady Howell of the MDAH for his help.

I would find it very difficult to write or edit a book without the help of my friend and neighbor, Mary Lois Ragland. She very ably critiques my work and also willingly uses her technical skills in preparing the copy. Thank you, Mary Lois!

The assistance of Hobbs Freeman, Terry Winschel, and Jeff Giambrone in deciphering portions of the diary that were difficult to read is very much appreciated as is Giambrone's help in finding material for the notes.

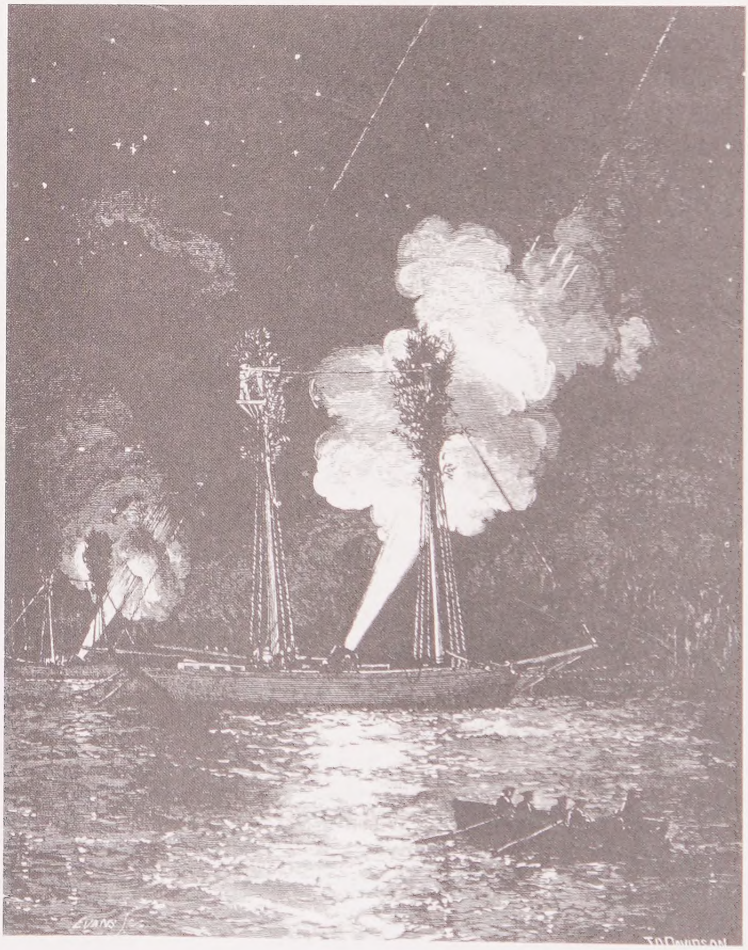
The battlefield about which Mrs. Balfour wrote is now a winding, tree-shaded parkway through rolling hills and valleys and around deep ravines. Her friends who hallowed the ground with their heroic deeds stand guard there today in bronze likenesses, their stories told on plaques and monuments.

At the Visitor Center in the Vicksburg National Military Park one can listen to the recorded observations of Mrs. Balfour, her poignant words unchanged, as enduring as time, as she described the horrors of a war that engulfed Vicksburg many, many years ago.

Gordon A. Cotton, Director/Curator
Old Court House Museum
Vicksburg, Mississippi
Spring, 2004

"All night the mortars shell & though they fell all around & near us, I slept at home almost soundly, after commending my soul and body to my heavenly father."

- Emma Balfour



The Diary

The Vicksburg Campaign was far more than a brief and bloody battle in the American Civil War: it was a series of battles and skirmishes over a period of more than a year to capture the fortress city that overlooked and controlled the Mississippi River.

After failures and defeats that included attempting to bombard the city into submission and then to take it by storm, the North was rewarded with victories at Port Gibson and Raymond, Jackson and Champion's Hill and Big Black River and other places along the line of march, only to be halted at Vicksburg's doorstep. It was then that Gen. U.S. Grant resorted to a siege.

Mrs. Balfour's diary began a few days before.

Saturday, May 16

Since I last wrote, all has been uncertainty and suspense. No news from any quarter - not a word from our army. It is terrible when we know that events, so fraught with deep interest to us, are transpiring. Night before last we heard pickets firing & one gun & thought the boats were about to commence an attack, but as all was still again, we understood it was a false alarm. Yesterday we learned that a coal barge had been towed to the bend by a gun-boat and it was at this the firing was. She cut the barge loose however & our men secured and brought it in. Eight

thousand bushels of coal - which the boats below must need greatly.

Saturday evening

We have just heard that Jackson is in the hands of the enemy. At the same time a dispatch from Gen. Pemberton ordering a train out of Edwards depot to bring in our supplies which are in danger. This looks ominous but I still have hope.

General Francis P. Blair's Union troops cross over the Big Black river on a make-shift bridge following the Battle of Champion Hill. (Battles and Leaders)

Sunday morning

My pen almost refuses to tell of our terrible disaster of yesterday.[1] From 6 o'clock in the morning till 5 in the evening, the battle raged furiously. We are defeated - our army in confusion and the carnage awful! Lieut. Underhill[2] came in to tell of it - he thinks Gen. Lee is killed![3] Gen. Stephenson[4] was in command of the whole & Gen. Lee's

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[1] The Battle of Champion's Hill, also called Baker's Creek, was fought May 16, 1863, on the plantation of Sid and Matilda Champion east of Edwards. In the fighting that lasted most of the day, the upper hand changed several times with the North finally claiming victory and forcing the Confederates to retreat toward Vicksburg. It was the most severe fight in the Vicksburg campaign and has been called by some the most decisive battle of the war. Mark M. Boatner III, **The Civil War Dictionary** (New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1959), pp. 875-876.

[2] Lieut. S.M. Underhill, who was on the staff of Gen. Stephen D. Lee in 1863 and in 1864, was volunteer aide de camp and also drill master. Gen. Lee in an official report noted that Underhill and others on his staff "behaved with gallantry during the siege." **The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies** (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1901), Series I, Vol. 24, p. 352. Hereafter referred to as the **ORs**. Also see Joseph H. Crute Jr., **Confederate Staff Officers, 1861-1865** (Powhatan, Va.: Derwent Books, 1982), p. 119.

[3] Stephen Dill Lee, born in South Carolina in 1833, was a West Point graduate who became the youngest lieutenant general in the Confederate Army. During the Vicksburg Campaign he was a brigadier general in charge of artillery. After the surrender he was exchanged, promoted, and commanded the cavalry in West Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama and East Louisiana. After the war he resided in Mississippi and became the first president of Mississippi State College. He was also in the state senate and was the first superintendent of the Vicksburg National Military Park. His headquarters in the siege of Vicksburg has never been determined but was probably somewhere in the vicinity of the Balfour House. Lee commanded the United Confederate Veterans and died in Vicksburg in 1908. He was one of the most capable corps commanders in the Confederacy. Ezra J. Warner, **Generals In Gray** (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1959), pp. 183-184.

[4] Carter Littlepage Stevenson was a Virginian who graduated from West Point and then served in the war with Mexico. As a Confederate officer he fought under both Pierre G.T. Beauregard and John C.

brigade four times met the shock of battle - going where we were most hotly pursued. Waddell's battery[5] which belonged to his brigade fought beautifully - but finding they were being surrounded the captain ordered them to limber up to wheels - as the horses came up to do so they were shot in a heap as they moved, by the sharpshooters. Then the men tried to haul off the guns but they too, poor fellows, were shot where they stood. The whole battery was captured - big guns & nearly all the men that were left. Capt. Waddell escaped, but Duncan Green,[6] he fears, is either killed or captured, as he saw his horse riderless & bloody! By this time there was great confusion - the slaughter dreadful. Gen. Lee repeatedly rallied his men - appealed to them by all their love of home & country to rally, threatened to shoot the first who ran but all to no purpose. Just then he sent Lieut. Underhill to order up ammunition & as soon as he left he was cut off from his Gen. but he could see him, the last man in the field, trying still to rally the fleeing men & the bullets falling in a shower around him. One horse had been killed under him (his large bay). He had mounted another. When Lieut. U. looked - or as soon as he could see - he looked and he was not to be seen - so he thought he must have fallen immediately.

Pemberton. At Vicksburg he commanded a division. Following the surrender he was with the Army of Tennessee until the end of the war. He was later a civil and mining engineer in Caroline County, Va., and died in 1888. He is buried in Fredricksburg. Warner, **Generals In Gray**, pp. 292-293.

[5] Capt. J.F. Waddell commanded an Alabama battery that was located near Fort Garrott, named for Gen. Isham Garrott, who was killed during the siege. Siege files, Old Court House Museum, Vicksburg, Miss. Hereafter referred to as OCHM.

[6] Duncan C. Green was a sergeant with Waddell's Battery and was probably a personal friend of the Balfours. In 1877 his name appeared as the author of a resolution of respect concerning the death of Dr. Balfour; the document appears to have come from the headquarters of the Episcopal Church. The undated clipping is in the Balfour file, OCHM.

He wept as he related all this, said he never saw such daring, such generalship - but alas it was all of no avail. He said he was not ashamed of his tears, for God never made a purer, braver, or nobler man. I, too, wept, but not only for him, indeed all individual feeling seems merged in grief and interest for my country. Oh, will God forsake us now! I cannot believe it. He may chasten us, and though cast down, I will not be disheartened or discouraged! Lieut. U. has promised (he returned at once) to look out for Gen. Lee, Duncan Green & Winston Reese[7] diligently. I know I can rely upon him, and if living, though wounded, to have Underhill get them, and at any rate to send me written intelligence of them during the day.

Later

Lieut. U. has just come to tell me that he has seen Major Gillespie[8] just from Big Black - Gen. Lee is alive & unhurt! See how God shields the brave! He with our army has fallen back to Big Black where the fight is still going on.[9] We hear heavy firing. It is supposed that in a few hours, they will fall back to our entrenchments around town. Some of the wounded have escaped but most of them fell into the hands of the enemy.

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[7] Winston Reese has not been further identified, though he was probably a staff or general officer.

[8] Major George L. Gillespie served in April 1862 and in November and December 1863 on the staff of Major Gen. Carter L. Stevenson. Crute, **Staff Officers,** p. 183.

[9] On May 17, 1863 Confederates retreating from Champion's Hill tried to slow the Federal advance by digging a trench across the mile wide neck of a horseshoe bend in the Big Black River west of Edwards, but in a one-hour fight 10,000 Yankees routed 4,000 Rebels, capturing 1700 men along with 18 guns. Though the Confederates destroyed the river bridge, the Northern troops hastily constructed two pontoon bridges and crossed the river the next day. Boatner, **Civil War Dictionary,** p. 876.

Later

I hope never to witness again such a scene as the return of our routed army! From twelve o'clock till late in the night the streets and roads were jammed with wagons, caissons, horses, men, mules, stock, sheep - everything you can imagine that appertaines to an army - being brought hurridely within the entrenchments. Nothing like order prevailed, or course, as divisions, brigades & regiments were broken and separated.

As the poor fellows passed every house poured forth all it had to refresh them. I had every one on the lot, and there were some visitors, carrying buckets of water to the corner for them. Then on the back gallery I had everything that was eatable put out & fed as many as I could. Poor fellows. It made my heart ache to see them, for I know from all I saw & heard that it was want of confidence in the Gen. commanding that was the cause of our disaster. I cannot write more - but oh! there will be a fearful reckoning somewhere. This had been brooding & growing - and many fears have been felt for the result. Gen. Pemberton[10] has not the confidence of officers, people or men, judging from all I am compelled to see and hear! I would rather not hear it - if I could help it.

What is to become of all the living things in this place when the boats commence shelling, God only knows.

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[10] John Clifford Pemberton of Philadelphia, PA was a West Point graduate who was breveted for gallantry in the War with Mexico. When the War Between the States began, Pemberton, who felt that the South was right (and who was married to a Virginian), resigned from the army and offered his services to the Confederacy. Placed in command at Vicksburg, he was hampered with conflicting orders from Gen. Joe Johnston and Pres. Jefferson Davis. Though forced to surrender the city after a 47 day siege, Pemberton insisted on favorable terms, an accomplishment no other Confederate general who faced U.S. Grant could claim. After the war he moved to Virginia, then to Pennsylvania, where he died in 1881. Despite criticisms by some Southerners, he was totally loyal to the Confederate cause. Warner, **Generals in Gray,** pp. 232-233.

Shut up as in a trap, no ingress or egress, are thousands of women & children, who have fled here for safety. Then all the mules and horses belonging to this department - and all the stock of all kinds for fifteen or twenty miles around! The Dr.[11] thinks human life will be endangered by the stampede amongst these creatures when terror seizes them. The only comfort is that we can live on them - for I fear we have not provender to feed them for long.

Monday, May 18

Still all seems confusion - & we are cut off from all knowledge of the outside world. We hear, that Johnston[12] has sent by a courier, that he has retaken Jackson. I don't see how that will avail us much, but if Forrest[13] is there, it may. If we can only hold this place till Johnston can come

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[11] Mrs. Balfour often referred to her husband William as "the Doctor." A Virginian, he studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania before moving to Vicksburg in the 1830s. Balfour files, OCHM.

[12] Joseph Eggleston Johnston graduated from West Point with R.E. Lee and was often decorated for distinction in the Seminole War and the War with Mexico. In Confederate service the fact that he ranked lower than several other generals created animosity between him and Jefferson Davis. During the siege of Vicksburg he was ordered to assist Pemberton by attacking the Union army's rear, but he was never ready and offered no assistance. He later commanded troops in Georgia but was relieved from command by Davis for retreating before Sherman's army rather than fighting. Johnston demonstrated his abilities in the field on numerous occasions but whether or not he possessed other necessary qualifications as a commander has long been debated. Warner, **Generals in Gray,** pp. 161-162.

[13] Nathan Bedford Forrest was born in Tennessee and had very little formal schooling. He entered the war as a private but was promoted rapidly, raising and equipping his own company of cavalry. His exploits were spectacular, and as his fame spread many Southerners no doubt wished for him. One citizen in Vicksburg, E.A. Hosmick, was arrested in 1864 by the Union occupation troops for stating he "wished to God Forrest would come and kill every Yank in Vicksburg." His service, however, was in other areas of the Confederacy. Provost Marshal's Record, May 7, 1864, OCHM.

to our aide outside! One whole division of men, Lorings,[14] was separated from the army and shut out. We hope they may unite with Johnston, but it reduces our forces here.

Later

The Yankees are at our entrenchments & we hear firing. Mrs. Lake's[15] place (where Mollie[16] was) is outside, and, sick as Mollie is, she has had to come in. Mrs. L. has lost all her corn & a great many other things, and I fear some of her negroes. The firing seems all along towards the Jackson road & the graveyard. Gen. Smith's divisions are now actually in the field - a great battle is expected at daylight.

Tuesday, May 19

There is firing all along the left wing (towards the graveyard) and towards the center - but not yet on the left. Gen. Lee is on the right - near the center - his brigade not yet engaged. Last night we saw a grand & awful spectacle. The darkness was lit up by burning houses all along our lines. They were burnt that our firing would not be obstructed. It was sad to see. Many of them we knew to be

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[14] William Wing Loring, a major general, commanded a division that became separated from the rest of Pemberton's army at Champion's Hill, thus escaping capture at the conclusion of the siege. He was the senior active major general in the Confederate Army when the war ended. He later commanded troops for the Egyptian government, returned to the United States in 1879, and died in 1886. He is buried in St. Augustine, FL. Warner, **Generals in Gray,** pp. 193-194.

[15] Ann Craig Lake was the widow of William A. Lake who was killed in a duel in 1861 while running for a seat in the provisional congress of the Confederate States. He had earlier served in the legislatures of Maryland and Mississippi and in the U.S. Congress. The Lakes lived on Main Street in Vicksburg near Christ Church but also owned a planta tion north of the city. Lake files, OCHM.

[16] Mollie has not been identified.

handsome residences - but the stern necessity of war has caused their destruction.

We have provided ourselves with a cave[17] as Gen. Lee says there will be no safety elsewhere. Our entrenchments are from a mile and a half to three miles from town, varying with the nature of the country. Of course shells and balls from these will reach any part of town - and the gunboats from the other side can throw to & beyond our entrenchments in many places. When the Gen. asked me if we were provided with a rat-hole, I told him it seemed to me we were all caught in a rat-hole.

Wednesday, May 20

Yesterday the firing was continuous all along the lines, till one o'clock, when the enemy threw a strong force against our right where Gen. Lee is. It is terrific! This part of the town is just south-east of us and of course where near, so we had the full benefit. It is just where the railroad crosses our lines.

I was up in my room sewing & praying in my heart oh, so earnestly for our cause, when Nancy[18] rushed up actually pale, exclaiming "Oh, Mistress, the Yankees are pouring over the hill & our men are running. Just come on the gallery and you can see!" It brought before me forcibly

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[17] Caught between two armies and unable to leave the city, Vicksburg residents either dug or hired someone to dig for them caves in the bluffs where they could flee for safety during the bombardment. Some caves had several entrances, numerous rooms, and could accommodate large numbers while others were little more than storm cellars. Some took items of luxury with them, making the caves as comfortable as possible. Letters and diaries from the era often mentioned life in the caves, the most famous being Mary Loughborough, **My Cave Life in Vicksburg** (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1864).

[18] Nancy was one of the Balfour's slaves.

- knew[19] in what a state of excitement we were living when I found that this news did not startle me. I got up, but I suppose slowly for she exclaimed "Mistress, just hear them. The shells are falling all around you. You will stay up here till you are killed!" I went on the back gallery with my glass, and saw men pouring over the hill as the sick-waggons were dashing through the shells, a brigade running towards this point so I thought perhaps it might not be so bad as she thought & quieted her a little. I found out that I was right, that point was hotly pressed & reenforcements were being sent from other points there. They were repulsed, and three times again during the day at the same point the same thing took place. Gen. Lee's praise is in every mouth. Yesterday at light again the battle commenced at that point alone, and all day there was nothing more than skirmishing at the other points, but a hot and heavy firing there all day. Some gentlemen tried to go there but had to jump off their horses & into the ditches for safety. About nine o'clock in the morning the gun boats towed some mortars into range, & then there was a rushing into the caves.

Mrs. Higgins[20] came up and we went into a cave for the first time. Col. Higgins thought we ought to go. Just as we got in several mortars exploded, it seemed just over our heads, and at the same time two mules were killed in the valley below us by a twenty-four pound parrot shell from the east side - so you see we were between two fires. As all

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[19] Mrs. Balfour's original manuscript includes the word "knew" through which she drew a line. The diary is in the Mississippi Archives and History in Jackson, Miss.

[20] Col. and Mrs. Edward Higgins were from Louisiana but during the siege of Vicksburg, when he commanded a river battery, they lived only a few blocks from the Balfours. Higgins was a graduate of the United States Naval Academy and served in the War with Mexico. When Louisiana seceded he was named an officer and commanded artillery at Forts Jackson and St. Philip in April 1862. Mrs. Balfour and Mrs. Higgins became friends during the siege. **The Vicksburg Times,** Oct. 10, 1869.

this rushed over me, & the sense of suffocation from being under ground, the certainty that there was no way to escape, that we were hemmed in - caged; - for one moment my heart seemed to stand still. Then my faith and courage rose to meet the emergency & I have felt prepared ever since & cheerful. We only staid there about an hour & a half. I preferred to risk the danger in a house, rather than in a cave with so many, so we are having a cave of our own made, but I certainly shall stay out as long as I can. All night before last the fleet fired, but I was quite sick & stayed in bed. Nearly all the families in town spent the night in their caves.

Thursday, May 21

The battle raged all day yesterday, again on the right. They seem determined to have that point. Last night after all was quiet, the Dr. rode out to know how it had gone with us & see friends. He found the Gen. at his dinner, in good spirits & confident of holding his position. He told me when he got here from Big Black that he did not believe his Alabamians would ever behave badly again,[21] that he had been around and talked to them all & he thought they would fight next time.

I believe I did not tell you he had his coat sleeve all torn by a passing bullet & another spent ball struck his arm, making it black from the shoulder to the elbow. Then at Big Black, or rather in falling back from Edwards to Big Black, he & Capt. Elliot[22] came near being captured by a ruse. The

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[21] Lee's men, many of them from Alabama, had suffered the worst of the enemy fire at Champion's Hill. On one occasion they retreated, leaving their guns, limbers, and caissons in the Federal's hands. Edwin C. Bearss, **Decision in Mississippi** (Little Rock: Pioneer Press, 1962), p. 261.

[22] Capt. William Elliott, assistant adjutant general on Stephen D. Lee's staff, was cited by Lee for his "uniform cool and gallant conduct(O)who was always at the post of danger, inspiring confidence by his example." He was promoted to major in August 1863 and was assistant adjutant

Yankee cavalrymen were all about them & they had ridden on some distance in advance of the brigade to look out. They saw two horsemen in Confederate uniforms approaching & called out "Who are you." They answered "Who are you." Gen. Lee answered "I am Gen. Lee." They called out "All right, Gen., come on." Immediately he suspected something & noticing at the same time that they had their pistols in their hands hanging down by the side, he waved his hand to them with a smile saying "No you don't," put spurs to his horse & was off. They fired their revolvers, & six pieces of artillery, they just maneuvered in the woods, opened on them, but strange to say, not a thing touched them or their horses!

Thursday, May 21, 10 o'clock

Heavy firing still on the right & heavy shelling from the line. This went on all night (from the line). Our batteries have been firing now for an hour & I think the evenings fire is ceasing. We have driven them back from above and below repeatedly in the last two days. They have one of those terrible monsters[23] & day before yesterday she tried to come near our batteries. They let her approach till within good range & then fired & fortunately the first shot struck her. She retired at once. Yesterday she approached again & after shots retired. Those behind seem more determined, but whenever a shot or two tells they retire.

Last night Mrs. Higgins & myself sat up till after eleven o'clock making cartridges. We get no help from the outside world now & have to help ourselves. Last night, after the firing ceased, as the Yankees passed in speaking distance of our works, our men called out "Lend us some coffee for supper, won't you, we will pay you when Johnston comes." They replied, "Never mind the coffee,

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and inspector general in 1864 and 1865. Crute, **Staff Officers,** p. 118; **ORs,** Series I, Vol. 24, p. 352.

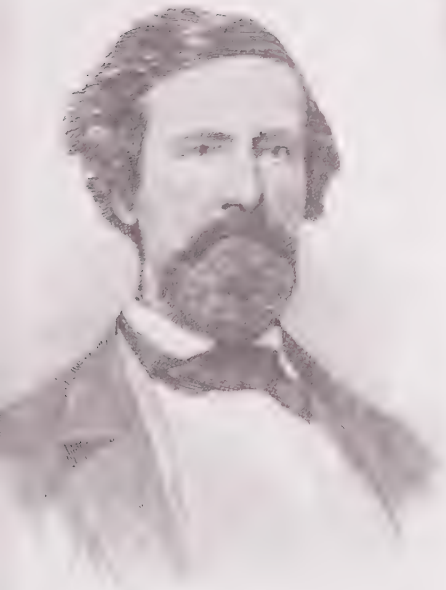
[23] Mrs. Balfour called the Union ironclad gunboats "monsters."

Gen. Stephen D. Lee
(left)

Col. Edward Higgins
(below)

Gen. John C. Pemberton
(lower left)

The drawings are from Battles and Leaders, published by The Century Co. in New York in 1887.



but Grant will take dinner in Vicksburg tomorrow." One of their Lieutenants we took yesterday says Grant has a hundred and thirty thousand men. I don't think this can be so.

I have sad intelligence of Winston Reese. As soon as our men got to the trenches, the Dr. rode all around himself till he found a young man who said he knew him well, that he was wounded near Edwards, and captured. Then he saw another who said he assisted to carry him off the field & he was wounded in the knee. I only hope he was able to telegraph his father from Jackson. What they have done with the wounded we do not know, we know nothing outside - but the prisoners we suppose have been carried up the river, as several transports passed up from the point opposite their woods, yesterday. Duncan Green is safe - I have seen him.

Saturday, May 23

I had to stop writing on Thursday. The shells exploded so thickly all around us, all day. About five o'clock there was a lull & we hoped to get some rest at night, but at six o'clock as we sat on the gallery a mortar shell exploded in the shed in front, making me involuntarily jump from my seat. Then another & another from all directions. The gun boats came & engaged our batteries & such a time as we had watching the shells. You cannot imagine. We were thankful when dark came, for we could better avoid them. We sat or stood in front of the house till eleven o'clock, knowing it would never do to go to bed as several houses had already been struck - Mrs. Pryor's[24] and

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[24] Jane B. Pryor, the widow of William Pryor, was a Virginian who lived a block west of the Balfours on Crawford and Monroe streets and was a close friend of Mrs. Balfour. Mrs. Pryor's son, Richard, a pharmacist, was ardently secessionist, even offering a reward in April 1861 for the death of Abraham Lincoln. Jane Pryor died in 1881 and is buried in Cedar Hill Cemetery in Vicksburg. Pryor files, OCHM.

Mrs. Willis'[25] - we concluded as we had to be up it was as well to see all that was going on, so we went down and paid Mrs. Pryor a visit in her cave; back of the Roman C. Church.[26] Then on to Sky Parlor Hill[27] and staid there till one o'clock. You must understand that it was not in the usual way we walked down the street but had to take the middle of the street whenever we heard a shell & watched for it, & as this was about every half minute you may imagine our progress was not very fast. As soon as a shell gets over your head you are safe, for even if it explodes then, the pieces fly forwards and do not touch you, but the danger is that sometimes while watching one, another comes and may explode or fall near you 'ere you are aware. Twice while we were on the hill the boats came up & attacked, but a few shot drove them back.

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[25] Martha Vick Willis had been the Balfours' next door neighbor until her death on June 17, 1856, after which her son John Willis lived there. He was only two when his father died in 1821. Young Willis was educated at Transylvania University and the College of New Jersey (Princeton). In the War with Mexico he was an officer in the First Mississippi, commanded by Jefferson Davis. In 1862 Willis was a member of a detachment that sank the Union ironclad **Cairo** in the Yazoo Canal. During the siege of Vicksburg Pemberton used the Willis home as headquarters, and in 1884 Emma Balfour bought the house. She died two years later and her heirs sold it.

[26] The Roman Catholic Church, St. Paul, was organized in 1839 and in the late 1840s the congregation built a fine Gothic structure only two blocks west of the Balfours' home; it was on the corner of Crawford and Walnut streets. The building was damaged during the siege, but it stood until 1954 when it was demolished following a tornado that struck downtown Vicksburg in 1953. Church files, OCHM.

[27] Sky Parlor Hill was a high plateau in the middle of downtown Vicksburg between Walnut and Washington streets on the east and west and Crawford and South streets on the north and south. A drive wound up from the east side, to the rear of the house; the west side was a sheer precipice. The hill was owned by the Genellas, an Italian-Swiss family who were Vicksburg merchants and leaders in the Catholic Church. Genella files, OCHM.

Soon after we got home Mrs. Crump[28] came from some cave where she had been quite exhausted. We made her come & lie down while we watched and she got a little sleep, but I don't think many eyes closed in town that night. Poor Mary Green[29] with her little ones was running from place to place all night & finally went into a cave. While we stood watching the shells while Mrs. Crump slept, one fell as we thought right in Mrs. Pryor's and another at the same time into Major Grimes[30] & another into Gen. Stephenson's.[31] The Dr. ran down to see & found the only one that did much harm was the one that struck Mrs. P's - it took both us busily engaged to keep a proper look out. I shall have to close now as they are falling so thickly both from the line & battlefield in the east. Yesterday we picked up five parrot shells unexploded & today they are falling thickly. I want to tell you of the gun boat fight I witnessed yesterday.[32]

Sunday morning, May 24

There is no possibility of writing regularly. Several times I have attempted to write but been compelled to stop. We have spent the last two nights in a cave but tonight I think we will stay at home. It is not safe I know, for the shells are falling all around us but I hope none may strike

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[28] Mary Jane Crump, the widow of John H. Crump who was superintendent of the railroad in Vicksburg in the 1850s, lived directly across Crawford Street from the Balfours. A native of Maryland, she was in her younger 40s during the siege. One son, Edward W., served with the Volunteer Southrons, who became Co. A on the 21st Mississippi. Crump files, OCHM.

[29] Mary Green was the wife of Duff Green, a Vicksburg merchant, and was the daughter of Ann C. Lake. Green files, OCHM.

[30] Major Grimes has not been identified.

[31] Gen. Stevenson's headquarters was in the McCutchen home a block west of the Balfours, on the southeast corner of Crawford and Monroe streets.

[32] Mrs. Balfour failed to tell about the battle.

us. Yesterday morning a piece of a mortar shell struck the school room roof,[33] tore through the partition wall, shattered the door sill & down the side of the wall. Another piece struck in the same room - & a third in the cement in front of the house. Such a large piece struck the kitchen also - but we see them explode all around us and as this is all the harm done to us yet we consider ourselves fortunate. Mrs. Hawkes'[34] house is literally torn to pieces & Mrs. Manlove's[35] was struck yesterday morning by a shell from one of the parrot guns east of us & very much injured. In both of these houses gentlemen were sick & in neither case was any one hurt. It is marvelous.

Two persons only that I have heard have been killed in town - and a little child. The child was buried in the wall by a piece of shell - pinned to it. Today a shocking thing occurred. In one of the hospitals where some wounded had just undergone operations, a shell exploded, & six men had to have limbs amputated. Some of them that had been taken off at the thigh, and one who had lost one arm had to have the other taken off. It is horrible, and the worst of it is we cannot help it.

I suppose there never was before the case of a besieged town when the guns from front & back met &

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[33] Mrs. Balfour was referring to the third floor attic rooms where she schooled the children. Pieces of shells were found in the walls of the house when it underwent restoration in the 1980s. Balfour House files, OCHM.

[34] J.P. and Rebecca Hawkes lived in the Lane house on Crawford Street, less than a block from the Balfours; he was a merchant. When the house was restored in the 1980s, parts of shipping crates with Hawkes name on them were found where he had used the boards to repair the damage.

[35] The Manlove home was only a block south of the Balfours on the northwest corner of South and Cherry streets, just inside the city limits. C.A. Manlove was from Virginia, his wife from Ohio, and they had three children. Living in their home in 1860 was William H. McCardle, who became an aide to Gen. Pemberton and during military occupation edited **The Vicksburg Daily Times.** His occupation in the 1860 census was "Gentleman."

passed each other. The other day while standing on Sky Parlor Hill a shell exploded & pieces struck in those flags[36] near the steps. This was from a machine.[37] Then a parrot shell from the eastern side passed over us and into Washington Street - between them a shot from a gun boat missed the batteries & struck the hill just below where we were standing. At that moment there was firing all around us, a complete circle from the fortifications above all around us to those below & from the river. We saw the gun boats as they came up in line & commenced the attack & watched it throughout till they retired. I knew there was danger as they came near of their shots reaching us, and then in the interest of watching them no one thought of watching the machines which were shelling ferociously all the time, but we were all so interested in the result of the general attack which was then made all around the lines, that no one thought of personal danger. That was a glorious day for us. They were repulsed all along the lines & in front. I have a piece of one of their flags taken at Gen. Lee's position. They stormed his works, got within them (some of them) & planted their flag on the breastworks. Then there was more work. They were not inside but in the ditch on the outside. The Gen. called for volunteers to drive them out & took all of them prisoners & captured their flag. You must know this was a dangerous thing to do, when their sharp shooters kill nearly every man that puts his head above the works.

The Benton,[38] Carondelet[39] & two other large boats & a tug were in the fight the other day while the mortars

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[36] Possibly Mrs. Balfour was referring to flagstones, or she may have been describing the iris plants, usually called flags. The other explanation is that there may literally have been flags flying near the steps.

[37] Mrs. Balfour referred to cannons as machines.

[38] The **Benton**, a Federal ironclad in the city series built by James B. Eads, was the most powerful fighting vessel in the Mississippi squadron in 1863. Francis T. Miller, editor, **The Photographic History**

stood over the other side of the peninsula, out of sight and shelled. They dismounted two of our guns, but not withstanding we drove them off. Gen. Pemberton was on the hill watching the result. Yesterday there was but little firing. They were burying their dead. I have quite a collection of shells which have fallen around us & if this goes on much longer I can build a pyramid. I realized that we are a besieged people yesterday when I saw several hundred mules in the morning & eight or nine hundred in the evening, driven beyond our lines - given to the Yankees or to starvation, because we have not the food to feed them - or, are afraid to use it for that purpose. No corn is issued for horses, except those of officers in the field.

Monday morning, May 25

For the first time in a week, there is comparitive quiet. All night the mortars shell & though they fell around & near us, I slept at home almost soundly, after commending my soul & body to my heavenly Father. This morning at five o'clock furious firing commenced all along the right wing & from the machines, but at this time there is only about a shell in every few minutes & the firing on the lines is distant. Yesterday afternoon we heard that Johnston had attacked Grant[40] in the rear, but I do not know whether it is so. Oh! how we all look to him as our savior! The

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of the Civil War, VII (New York: The Review of Reviews, 1911), p. 150.

[39] The **Carondelet** was one of the Eads-built ironclads and part of the Mississippi River squadron. In 1862 she was heavily damaged by the **CSS Arkansas** but took an active part in the siege of Vicksburg. **Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships** (Washington: Navy Department, 1963), II, p. 39.

[40] Gen. U.S. Grant commanded Union troops in the Vicksburg campaign. From Illinois and a West Point graduate, he had known Confederate Gen. Pemberton in the War with Mexico and Gen. John S. Bowen when they lived in Missouri. Grant's wife Julia Dent Grant had numerous relatives in the Vicksburg area. Dent files, OCHM.

enemy are moving from our left (up the line) to our left (down the line). What is their object none can tell - whether it is to be more convenient to water or to throw their whole force against one point is only surmise.

In the midst of all this carnage & commotion, it is touching to see how every work of God save man, gives praise to him. The birds are singing as merrily as if all were well, rearing their little ones, teaching them to fly & fulfilling their part in nature's programme as quietly & happily as if this fearful work of man slaying his brother man was not in progress. The heavy firing gives us showers every day and nature is more lovely than usual. The flowers are in perfection, the air heavy with the perfume of cape jessamine & honeysuckle and the garden gay & bright with all the summer flowers. The fruit is coming to perfection, the apricots more abundant & more beautiful than I ever saw them. Nature is all fair and lovely - "all save the spirit of man seems divine."

Later

Gen. Lee & Capt. Elliot have just left here. They came in & took lunch. They say the greater part of the army have left - they suppose to meet Gen. Johnston. At any rate, we have comparative rest now. Though they keep up sufficient firing to prevent our men having rest, still all are not needed as when an assault is momentarily expected. Thank God for this respite. They have left their dead thick in the field & Gen. Pemberton is about sending out a flag of truce to ask them to bury them or to offer to do so for them."[41]

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[41] The stench from the bodies of the dead had become almost unbearable to both sides, yet Grant refused to accept a truce to bury them. Pemberton offered to bury the dead for both armies, at which instance Grant agreed to a truce on May 25. A.A. Hoehling, **Vicksburg, 47 Days of Siege** (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969).

Tuesday, May 26

Yesterday the flag of truce was sent out, & met by one from the enemy, asking permission to bury their dead. They were a long time making up their minds to do so - an armistice was to exist till nine o'clock last night, but just before it commenced the mortars across the river gave us a parting salute, of sixty five shells, in forty five minutes! You must know it kept one busy to keep up with them. We were lying down at the time & they shook the house like a cradle, & once or twice we were sure the other side of the house was struck. They were at it again this morning, but more along the lines than from the river & the guns seem nearer. Yesterday there was comparatively no firing along the lines.

Gen. Lee & Capt. Elliot came in to see us. They took lunch & seemed to enjoy it very much, poor fellows! It was the first time in a week they had eaten without an accompaniment of minnie balls & parrot shells. They seem in fine spirits. Gen. Pemberton was here yesterday - he seems very hopeful, says we can hold the place sixty days & even more by living on very short rations. We heard from the Yankees who were burying the dead, that Bragg[42] had whipped Rosecrans[43] & Lee[44] had another battle &

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[42] Braxton Bragg, a West Pointer with a gallant record in the War with Mexico, was a Louisiana planter in the 1850s. His role with the Confederacy was less than spectacular, and the rumor that he had whipped Rosecrans was at that time untrue. Warner, **Generals in Gray**, p. 30.

[43] William S. Rosecrans graduated fifth in his class at West Point, but his military career was less than spectacular except for some early successes in Virginia. He was eventually defeated by Bragg, on Sept. 19-20, but not at the time Mrs. Balfour wrote. **Ibid.**, pp. 410-411.

[44] Mrs. Balfour's reference is to Gen. Robert E. Lee who defeated Union Gen. Hooker at Chancellorsville May 2-4, 1863. **Ibid.**, p. 182.

defeated Hooker[45] but we don't know whether to believe it or not. We hear also from them that Johnston is in the rear but Gen. Pemberton says he has no news from outside since the 18th, Thursday week. The Yankees after leaving our left & going to the right, yesterday marched again in force to the left again. Also, many transports are seen crossing troops over & going towards the Yazoo, but as we have no scouts out there we know nothing of what is going on. We evacuated Snyder's Bluff[46] when we fell back to Vicksburg.

Wednesday, May 27

Nothing from the outside world yet. All day & all night the shells from the mortars are falling around us, and all day from the guns around the fortifications. No rest for our poor soldiers who have to stay close in the trenches all day in the hot sun. It is a most discouraging sort of warfare. The enemy shoot from minnie muskets[47] & parrot guns all day - if a head, even a hand appears above the breastworks it is riddance & we do not fire in return except from artillery unless they attempt an assault. Of course any of our men & many of our officers are killed & wounded every day. We do not fire because we have no ammunition to waste & must save it to repel assaults, but it is very discouraging to the men.

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[45] Gen. Joseph Hooker of Massachusetts had the dubious distinction of providing his name for women of questionable virtue who were camp followers. **Ibid.,** p. 235.

[46] Snyder's Bluff, about ten miles north of Vicksburg on the Yazoo River, was part of the Battle of Chickasaw Bayou where Sherman was so badly defeated in the winter of 1862-63. At the time Grant's men were landing south of Vicksburg at Bruinsburg on May 1, Sherman threatened an attack at Snyder's Bluff, which kept Pemberton from sending more men to block Grant's landing. Gen. Louis Herbert withdrew his forces from the area and fell back into Vicksburg in mid May 1863.

[47] Mrs. Balfour was referring to muskets that shot a .58 caliber bullet called a Minie ball. Parrot guns were rifled cannons.

I have staid at home every night except two. I could not stand the mosquitoes & the crowd in the caves. Most people live entirely in them, for there is no safety anywhere else - indeed there is no safety there. Several accidents have occurred. In one cave nearly a whole family was killed or crippled. Mrs. Lake & all the family, servants and all, live entirely in caves. Last night I thought we would have to go somewhere, but at last worn out with watching, we retired and slept as if we were in safety. Now & then when a shell exploded nearer than usual or the house shook more than usual, we would listen for a while & then sleep again. The Dr. says he begins to realize now that all can get used to skimming - to think of ones sleeping with these twelve & thirteen inch shells, three inches in thickness, falling & exploding all around, now & then tearing a house to pieces, and knowing that yours may be next; seems strange, but so we are constituted. Poor Mrs. Crump does not get used to it, and it is pitable to see her at every shell jumping up & crouching with fear. This morning the fire is heavy along our right wing.

I send out buttermilk every day to Gen. Lee & staff, and yesterday when Joe[48] came for it I told him to go over & give my compliments to Gen. Grant and ask him to send me some newspapers, and to tell him, not to shoot those shells so near that they might break some of my flower pots. Joe took it all in earnest, and Nancy told me he said he would send over there to those Yankees.

Major Grimes had a tent put up for me yesterday, close under Sky Parlor Hill, a very safe place no doubt & much pleasanter than a cave, but I have only been down to look at it. He wanted us to sleep there last night. The place is more injured there by the whole of the bombardment last season.[49] In some parts of the town, the streets are literally

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[48] Joe was one of the Balfour's slaves.

[49] Mrs. Balfour was referring to the bombardment in the spring of 1862 by Adm. David G. Farragut's fleet.

ploughed up. Many narrow escapes have been made, but I have only heard of three deaths of citizens from shells.

Later

I have just come from Sky Parlor where we went to see another gun-boat fight. Five boats from below and one terrible monster from above engaged our batteries. In a very short time we perceived that the monster was disabled & a tug from above came to her relief. Some later, men seen to leave her side. Then she drifted over to the Mississippi shore - and then arose the glad shout "She is sinking!" Sinking indeed she was - and there she lies under water except her chimneys & her horn![50] Those from below retired when they saw this, so the battle is over for today & we again victorious on water! There is a curious craft above which looks like a regular man-of-was from the distance we see her. She is up near the transports & when the "monster" was firing she started towards us - but retired when she was disabled! I don't think any of them will be so anxious to try our batteries again. The impression is that this monster was trying to get to the fleet below to operate with them in a general attack.

Friday, May 29

Yesterday morning Col. Higgins came in about seven o'clock, just from Gen. Pembertons next door (he is in Gus Kelly's[51] house) to show us an official dispatch

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[50] The **Cincinnati** was one of the Fads ironclads. When she sank after a 48 minute engagement with the Confederate guns, citizens watched from Sky Parlor Hill and other observation points and cheered as she went down. W.H. Tunnard, **The History of the Third Regiment Louisiana Infantry** (Baton Rouge: Privately printed, 1866), pp. 241-242.

[51] Gus Kelly has not been found in various Vicksburg records, but his house in which Higgins was quartered was on Crawford Street in the

which Gen. P. had just received by a courier[52] and, en passant, the courier was the author of "All quiet along the Potomac." It was to say that Gen. Johnston with 30 thousand men & Loring with 10,000 were at Canton & Jackson, that Bragg is marching to our relief, that Lee had driven the Yankees across the Potomac & they had burned Long bridge,[53] & were in possession of Arlington heights[54] - & in addition to this, he, the courier, brought us 18,000 rifle caps which we greatly need & says two million are on the way! You may judge we were excited. This, the first piece of news from the outside world we have had in 10 days, was glorious. I had laughed at Gen. Pemberton the day before for being gloomy & told him the ladies were not despondent, so he told Col. Higgins to tell me he thought things looked brighter now. The Dr. invited Col. Higgins & some of the battery officers & Gen. Pemberton & a few others to come up to lunch & wish a thanksgiving for this good news & the sinking of the boat the day before, so we made merry over it. Gen. Pemberton said the Yankees, if they could look in, would not think we minded the siege very much.

Gen. Lee took tea with us last night, the second time he has been in since he took the field. He told us he was afraid our house would be too hot for us today, as he

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block where the downtown post office is located, behind city hall, according to a plaque on the building's lawn.

[52] The courier was Lamar Fontaine, a world traveler and adventurer born in Texas in 1829. He claimed he wrote "All Quiet on the Potomac" after a fellow soldier was killed by a sniper despite the fact a truce had been declared. Fontaine's claim was disputed by Ethel Lynn Beers, and the authorship has never been resolved. Fontaine died Sept. 3, 1921 at Lyon, Miss. Fontaine file, OCHM.

[53] The Yankees, under command of Gen. Hooker, did not burn the bridge over the Potomac but did take up the flooring as they retreated during the battle of Chancellorsville on May 6, 1863. Vincent J. Esposito, editor, **The West Point Atlas of American Wars, I** (New York; Frederick A. Praeger, 1959.), Map 91.

[54] The news about Arlington Heights was a rumor and untrue.

intended to open a huge gun he had put up, on them this morning, cruel as it is - exactly in range of our house, and they would attempt to silence it - we must look out. Sure enough, after passing a bad night from the bursting of bombs around us, we were roused this morning by the whistling of parrot shells & I assure you we dressed hurriedly. They come so thick & fast it seemed a miracle that none came in the windows or against the house.

I found the servants all in consternation as they had seen them striking in many places. One struck Mrs. Lawrences,[55] one Mrs. Pryors & after knocking the chimney off killed a mule in her yard. None have struck us as yet, partly owing to the protection of Mrs. Willis' house, but far more to the mercy of God. Yesterday evening Mrs. Lake & Lee[56] walked around during a lull in the shelling for Alice[57] who had spent the day with me. While here, the mortars opened again & they were very much alarmed. While the Dr. & Major Devereaux[58] were standing outside of the library window, talking to them, a bomb exploded overhead scattering pieces all around us. One struck Major

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[55] Martha Lawrence, the 44 year old widow of Eli M. Lawrence, lived diagonally across from the Balfours on the northwest corner of Cherry and Crawford streets. Her husband had been a clerk, and after he died in the 1850s she ran a boarding house. Her son Frank S. Lawrence served in the Warren and Claiborne Guards that became Co. I of Wirt Adams Brigade in the Confederate Army. In 1864 Isaac Shoemaker, a carpetbagger from Ohio, desperate to find a place to stay until he could lease a plantation, moved into Mrs. Lawrence's, describing her as "a strong secesh but a kind pleasant Lady, who allowed me to lie on a sofa in her parlor at $2 per day." Isaac Shoemaker's Diary, Duke University Library, Durham, NC. Also see census returns for Vicksburg for 1850 and 1860 and the compilation of Warren County Confederate soldiers, OCHM.

[56] Lee has not been identified.

[57] Alice was the daughter of Mary C. Lake.

[58] Major John G. Devereaux was on the staff of Maj. Gen. M.L. Smith, serving during the siege as assistant adjutant general. Gen. Smith said of Devereaux and several others that they "did their duty intelligently, fearlessly, promptly, and efficiently." **ORs**, Series I, Vol. 24, p. 399.

"The Church had been considerably injured, and was so filled with bricks, mortar & glass that it was difficult to find a place to sit."

- Emma Balfour

Devereaux on the arm, but it was fortunately a very small fragment. One piece fell in our vegetable garden as large as the whole diameter of the shell - twelve inches. They started home and while going up Cherry Street four shells exploded in front & behind them. It is the last time they will come in this part of town I expect. Just as many fall near them but they are in the cave & do not see them. We have been mercifully preserved so far. For an hour now there has been no firing. I don't know what it means. Gen. Lee tells us there are twenty-four guns opposite his lines, & I can believe it from the experiences we had this morning.

Saturday, May 30

We had comparative quiet yesterday, after the morning, till five o'clock when the most fearful cannonading commenced from the lines. I never saw anything like it. People were running in every direction to find a place of safety. The shells fell literally like hail. Mrs. Willis' house was struck twice & two horses in front of her door killed. Gen. Pemberton & staff had to quit it. I made the servants crouch under the alley wall & all the couriers got under there with them. I took my knitting & went into the parlor as I did not think the shells would do me much harm by the time they had passed through three brick walls they would not hurt me - but some gentlemen who came in when it was over told me I had been very rash. However, I felt safe & I should feel safe there again. It only lasted an hour & a great deal of damage was done in that time. Three persons in town were killed, all servants.

Gen. Pemberton received another message from Gen. Johnston last eve - very encouraging, and this courier brought 20,000 more caps. He very kindly (Gen. P.) came in to tell me of it. I think he is inclined to be rather despondent & my persistent hopefulness cheers him. I hear I am a great favorite with him. Yesterday eve Capt. Elliot

brought in Lieut. Martin[59] with a high fever for us to nurse. The Dr. thinks it was produced by the bursting of a shell so near him, as to produce deafness & violent headache. Just after he came, the Chaplain of Withers Artillery[60] came to ask if I would take Lieut. Hooker[61] of their regiment who had had his arm taken off by a shell & who is in a highly excited nervous state. He said he knew there was danger here from parrot shells & bombs, but he heard I was the coolest lady in town, never discomposed by the shelling & he thought my calmness would keep him cooler and so prevent any fatal effects. I could but laugh, but I told him I would take him with a great deal of pleasure & do my best for him. He has not been brought however yet, and I fear he is too ill to be moved.

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[59] Lieut. H.N. Martin, who was either acting or assistant aide de camp on the staff of Gen. Stephen D. Lee during the siege, was promoted to captain after the surrender and was assistant adjutant general. Lee cited Martin for gallantry. Some of Lee's men captured a Yankee flag, and he had it sent back to them, from his headquarters, by Martin, who had been wounded. Mrs. Balfour was given a piece of a captured flag; this may have been it. **ORs,** Series I, Vol. 24, pp. 350-352.

[60] Withers Artillery of the First Mississippi Light Artillery was commanded by William Temple Withers of Edwards, Miss. The chaplain has not been identified.

[61] Charles E. Hooker, born in South Carolina and educated at Harvard, began the practice of law in Mississippi in 1848. He entered Confederate service as a private and was later lieutenant of the First Regt. of Mississippi Light Artillery. After losing his arm at Vicksburg he was promoted to colonel in the cavalry and served until the end of the war. In 1865 he was elected attorney general for Mississippi, removed from office by occupation troops, but elected again in 1868. In later years he was elected to the United States Congress for nine terms, though not consecutively. He is said to have become friends with Union veteran John Wesley Powell, who also lost an arm during the war. When Powell was Secretary of the Interior and Hooker in Congress, they exchanged gloves for the hands they didn't have as one had lost a right arm, the other a left. **Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1927** (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1928), p. 1111.

The shelling from the mortars was worse than usual last night. It kept me from sleeping and Lieut. Martin passed a bad night. I hear this morning that a bomb exploded in the courthouse, killing two men & wounding seven, & in another house several were injured. I could hear the pieces falling all around us as the shells would explode & once I thought our time had come.

This morning it is comparatively quiet - Trinity Sunday - How like & yet how unlike Sunday. All nature wears a Sabbath calm, but the thunder of artillery reminds us that man knows no Sabbath - Yankee man at least.

Yesterday it was more quiet than usual all day, but as soon as it was dark two gun boats came up and commenced shelling the woods below here, & the mortars, all of them, opened on the city & kept it up all night. We soon perceived that we could not retire while they fired as they had changed the range & every shell came either directly over us or just back or front of us, so we made up our minds to sit up and watch, hoping, however, that they would cease about midnight, as they sometimes do, and commence about light - but no, all night it continued & to add to the horrors. At 12 o'clock the guns all along the lines opened & the parrot shells flew as thick as hail around us! Then there was commotion! We had gone up stairs, determined to rest. We ventured lying down but not sleeping, but when these commenced to come it was not safe up stairs, so we came down in the sitting room & lay down upon the bed there, but soon found that would not do, as they came from the south east as well as east & might strike the house. Still from sheer uneasiness, we remained there till a shell struck in the garden against a tree & at the same time we heard the servants all up and making exclamations. We got up thoroughly worn out & disheartened & after looking to see the damage, went into the parlor & laid on the sofas there till morning, feeling that at any moment a mortar shell might crash through the roof, though we felt comparatively safe from the others. We have

slept none scarcely now for two days & nights. Oh! it is dreadful.

After I went in to lie down while the Dr. watched every shell from the machines as it came rushing down like some infernal demon, seemed to me to be coming exactly on me, and I had looked at them so long, that I can see them just as plainly with my eyes shut as with them open. They come gradually making their way higher & higher, tracked by their firing fuse till they reach their greatest altitude - then with a rush & whiz they come down furiously, their own weight added to the impetus given by the powder. Then look out, for if they explode before reaching the ground which they generally do, the pieces fly in all directions - the very least of which will kill one, and most of them of sufficient weight to tear through a house from top to bottom! The parrot shells come directly so one can feel somewhat protected from them by getting under a wall, but when both come at once & so fast that one has not time to see where one set are going before another comes, it wears one out.

The general impression is that they fire at the city in this way, thinking they will wear out the women & children & sick, and Gen. Pemberton will be impatient to surrender the place on that account, but they little know the spirit of the Vicksburg women & children if they expect this. Rather than let them know that they were causing us any suffering, I would be content to suffer martyrdom! Some few timid ones started a petition last week asking Gen. Pemberton to grant a flag of truce to send the women & children beyond the lines. He said he could not do it for an individual but if a majority of the citizens would sign it, he would do so. Judge Barnett,[62] who started it, tried to get signatures, but

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[62] Judge Richard Barnett and his family were members of Christ Church and friends of the Balfours. He and his wife were Virginians but all of their children were born in Mississippi. Following the surrender, two of his daughters walked out of Christ Church when the minister prayed for Abraham Lincoln rather than Jefferson Davis. One

did not get one except the three persons who had gotten it up! I told Gen. Pemberton I hoped he never would grant anything of the kind as we had all been sufficiently warned.

The other day when there was a truce to bury the dead, one of the Yankee gens. wanted to be very civil to Gen. Lee, invited him to go over and drink with him, which the Gen. declined. Then he tried to converse in a very friendly way, regretting that during the truce they had shown bad faith in permitting the mortars still to fire on the city - said it was a misunderstanding & he deeply regretted it. The Gen. knew this was not so, for they have signals & in an instant fire or stop as signaled, but he treated it as of no importance - told him oh! it was of no consequence. There was no one in the city but the women & children & the sick & they were accustomed to it. He wanted to know then how long the truce continued (he knew very well it was till nine o'clock). Gen. Lee told him it made no difference how long it continued, the purpose for which it was asked was accomplished so far as his lines were concerned, & if he saw proper, he could withdraw his men and let hostilities commence at once. He was only trying to be agreeable, and he seemed deeply mortified, made many apologies, said the Gen. misunderstood him entirely, then remarked, "Gen. your lines seem very strong." "Yes," said the Gen. "I think I can hold them" & so ended their conference.

Conversations occur nightly between friends on the opposite sides. Two Missouri brothers held a conversation very friendly - one sent the other coffee and whisky. Then they parted with an oath and an exclamation from one that he would "blow the others heads off tomorrow."[63] How

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daughter later wrote a novel based on the siege, and a daughter married Emma Balfour's nephew Willie Harrison. Barnett files, OCHM.

[63] The two Missouri brothers may be the ones written about by Capt. Joel W. Strong of Co. I, 10th Missouri (Union). In writing after the war, Strong told of two brothers on opposite sides who, on the day of surrender walked with arms about each other's waists all day. He wrote,

unnatural all this is. The commanders object to this intercourse, but it is impossible they say in two armies so near to prevent it altogether. I hear firing from the gun boats.

Tuesday morning, June 2

Since I wrote last I have been closely occupied in nursing Lieut. Martin who is very sick & the bursting of shells near keeps him so nervous that he cannot sleep.

On Sunday Mr. Lord[64] at the particular request of Alice Lake & myself held service. There was not much firing & though the ringing of the bell only announced service, there were thirty persons. I walked there and back, but, I was glad to do so for the sake of worshiping once more. The Church[65] has been considerably injured, and was so filled with bricks, mortar & glass that it was difficult to find a place to sit. Next Sunday I intend sending out another petition.

Last night was one long to be remembered in the annals of our little city. In addition to the usual shelling from the bombs & parrot guns there was a terrible fire in town. Nearly the whole of the block from Brown &

"It was a sight most impressive and one to remain vivid a life time - the one in blue with uniform fresh, buttons shining, gun and bayonet bright; the other in gray, ragged uniform, barefoot and grimy." Civil War files, OCHM.

[64] Rev. Wilberforce W. Lord, rector of Christ Episcopal Church, was from New York and came to Vicksburg in the mid-1850s. He was ardently pro-Southern and despite an offer from Grant to provide passage home after the siege, Lord chose to go with the Confederate army. In South Carolina his church was burned by Sherman's men. After the war he returned to Vicksburg, in 1869, to pastor a new parish, Holy Trinity. Lord files, OCHM.

[65] Christ Episcopal Church was organized in 1826 and the sanctuary dedicated in 1839 by Bishop Leonidas Polk. The rectory was so badly damaged by the shelling it had to be replaced, but the church stands today as the oldest public building in Vicksburg. Church files, OCHM.

Johnston to Crutchers store burned,[66] only two houses left. It is the third fire that has taken place in that neighborhood and is doubtless the work of an incendiary. There is a magazine near and the burning up of that would ruin that part of the town. It was an awful and strange sight. As I sat at my window, I saw the mortars from the west passing entirely over the house & the parrot shells from the east passing by, crossing each other and this terrible fire raging in the center.

One or two persons who had passes to leave the city, if they could, returned last night, Grant saying that no one should leave the city till it surrendered.

I have almost made up my mind not to think of retiring at all at night. I see we are to have no rest. They are evidently trying to harass our army into submission. All night they fire so that our poor soldiers have no rest, and as we have very few reserves, it is very hard on them.

* * * * * * *

On June 2, 1863 Emma Balfour began her journal entry almost as she had begun it on May 16 - "Since I wrote last...." It was her final account of the siege, and there was no explanation, not even a hint that she would not continue recording her observations. A month later Pemberton surrendered his army, and Vicksburg began the bitter endurance of military occupation. Emma and her children, however, spent the remainder of the war in Demopolis, Ala. in a house Dr. Balfour rented for them after securing a pass for the family to go through the lines. The Doctor returned

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[66] Brown and Johnston was a banking firm on the corner of Washington and Clay streets, and Crutcher and McRaven owned a general mercantile store a block away on the corner of Washington and Crawford streets.

to Vicksburg where his patients needed him, but he often visited his wife and children.

Following the surrender on July 4, 1863 Gen. James B. McPherson and his staff occupied the Balfour House as headquarters. Where in the city Dr. Balfour lived is unknown, but records show that he was targeted by Union officials and made to pay fines in order to provide for pro-Union refugees who had moved to town.

After the war the Balfours returned to their home and attempted to resume normal lives. They were again active in Christ Church, and Emma won top honors at the county fair for making the best homemade wine. The children grew up, the four girls marrying and young William attending medical school.

Dr. Balfour died in 1877, and Emma continued to reside at their home. She died in 1886 and after services at Christ Church was buried beside him at Cedar Hill Cemetery.

An army photographer took this picture of the Balfour House after the siege.The house was the headquarters for Gen. James B. McPherson during part of the military occupation. (Library of Congress)

Sky Parlor Hill in downtown Vicksburg was a precipice where the Genella home stood and was also used as a Confederate signal station; it is pictured in the center. The other drawings are of caves in which local residents lived during the siege. The drawings were made from photographs in 1884 for Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, Vol. III.

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